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ABSTRACT

Principals who make the decision and investment to produce a school newsletter should follow these guidelines to obtain an informative and attractive product. The first step is to define the purpose of the newsletter, then determine the target audience--probably parents--and write the newsletter with them in mind. Next, decide what the newsletter should say and aim the content at the target audience. A letter size sheet, printed on both sides, is usually sufficient. The design element should strive for clarity and simplicity and the style should be jargon free, clear, and consistent. Although the principal is in charge, staff members can be enlisted to assist in the project. Newsletters should be mailed, or student groups paid a small fee for home delivery. Finally, after a year of publication, the objectives and purposes of the newsletter should be reviewed. (MLF)

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*Tips for Principals* from NASSP April 1985

# How To Publish a School Newsletter

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*Tips for Principals* from NASSP April 1985

# How To Publish a School Newsletter

An informative, attractive school newsletter can be a big boost to your school's information and public confidence program. A school newsletter, if done poorly, is *not* better than not doing one at all. If you make the decision and investment to produce a school newsletter, follow these guidelines.

## What Is Your Purpose?

Frequently newsletters are started because other schools have them or because the superintendent wants one. But before you begin, ask what the newsletter will do for your school program and students.

Newsletters carry information to their readers; some even strive to change the behavior of their audiences. They ask people to volunteer for a parent activity, give their opinion on new issues, and praise their teachers for a job well done.

The key question, then, is what difference will this newsletter make for its readers. Write objectives to define the purpose of your newsletter.

## Who Is Your Audience?

You need to pinpoint your audience as soon as you begin to plan your newsletter.

Most school newsletters are sent to parents, guardians, staff, students, and central office personnel. Some principals send it to houses located near their schools (their neighbors), "key communicators" in their attendance area, government officials, staff of feeder schools, parents of the upcoming freshmen, and the local media.

The key, however, is to determine the target audience—probably parents—and to write the newsletter with them in mind.

## What Should You Say?

After you decide on the target audience and purpose of the newsletter, you need to decide what the newsletter should say.

Aim the content at your target audience. Most parents want to know about (1) progress of their student, (2) what is being taught, (3) how it is being taught, and (4) what outside experts are saying about your school's program.

Of course, parents also need general information about upcoming events, new policies, and special counseling programs.

One principal tracks major education issues receiving media coverage and then makes sure his newsletter covers those issues throughout the year. In the last year, he has included stories on discipline, scholastic eligibility requirements for sports, and tips for parents with latchkey kids.

## What Size Should It Be?

It is best to keep your newsletter short and simple. An 8½" × 11" sheet printed on both sides is usually sufficient for a principal's newsletter to parents. If you keep it attractive, neat, well-organized, timely, accurate and *regular*, that's all you'll need. Plan to publish it at least monthly with special issues for events needing extra attention during the year.

## Should It Be Designed by a Professional?

The answer is maybe. The design element of your newsletter should strive for clarity and simplicity. Busy parents won't spend a great deal of time reading a lengthy, unattractive newsletter.

Some principals call on a graphic artist to design the banner on the front and also to lay out the first issue. The banner—usually in two colors—is then preprinted for a year's distribution and each issue is printed in the school's or district's print shop.

Many principals use typewriters or word processors to "set" the type in their newsletter. If you choose that route, follow these tips:

- Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch.
- Single space the story itself and double space between paragraphs.
- *Keep paragraphs no longer than eight lines.*
- Double space between a headline and the story.

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- Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story.
- *Don't handletter headlines;* use art transfer type available at a good art supply store.
- *Don't use italics* (except possibly for short captions), or script type.
- Use a pica typewriter, preferably with serif type.

## Should It Take on an Educator Style?

With all deference to educators, absolutely not.

Keep the newsletter jargon free. Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs, action verbs, and the active voice.

Write to express, not to impress. Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations as most people (your readers) outside education won't understand what they mean. Be sure to add direct quotes where possible and try to include a positive tone in all your copy.

Be consistent. Establish a style and stick with it. Consider using a style book and make sure a copy of it is in your school library.

Don't expect your readers to work. They won't take the time to unravel a complicated line of reasoning and they won't read "between the lines." What you want them to know must be spelled out in black and white.

Here's an example of what not to write: "As the instructional leader of the new innovative curriculum established in the Woodrow Wilson Learning Center, Ms. Smith began prioritizing the work stations with their respective recipients." Better said: "Guidance counselor Carolyn Smith, a leader in the new career guidance system in our library, is now working with 10th grade students to select their possible career choices."

## Who's in Charge of the Newsletter?

As principal, you are! But you may want to assign an editor to coordinate the entire project. Look at your staff and decide whose skills meet your needs. Often English or journalism teachers are contracted as editors, but other staff members may also do the job for you.

You need an editor who can write, has a sense of what your readers want, and is sensitive to school-community issues. If you go outside your staff for an editor, make sure that the sensitivity issue is tackled early on in your discussions.

If you use an editor, make sure you give him or her some authority along with the responsibility. Establish timelines and review and planning sessions so no one is surprised when the newsletter comes off the press.

## What's the Best Method of Distribution?

Research tells us that after fifth grade most students do not take the newsletter home. Most secondary students toss them in corridors, lockers, or school buses. Consider mailing the newsletters using the economical third class, non-profit, bulk rate. Perhaps your parent group could help by paying the mailing costs.

If you can't afford to mail, think about using student groups to deliver it throughout the community. Instead of selling candy, magazines, or cakes, offer to pay students for every 100 copies that are delivered. Keep the cost lower than the post office rate, but make it worthwhile for the student groups.

Place yourself or friends on the mailing list to "test" the delivery accuracy of your distribution system.

## Is Anybody Reading It?

After a year of publication, review the objectives and purposes of your newsletter. Were the objectives met?

At a parent meeting, ask parents what they think of the newsletter and how it could be improved. Put together an advisory council of parents to review up to six issues and ask them what's good and what needs improvement.

Evaluation will make your newsletter better, so don't avoid this important last step.

Further information about producing a school newsletter is available from the public information office of NASSP or by contacting the National School Public Relations Association in Arlington, Va.

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